



**Farewell Address
Senator Jay Rockefeller
United States Senate
December 4, 2014**

I come to today with a spirit of reflection and optimism for our future. I am also compelled toward an honest assessment of who we are as a body, of the promise of what we can achieve when we don't shy away from compromise, and of why the job and, yes, the hard work of public service, is a noble calling.

Here in the United States Senate, we have a unique ability and responsibility to do big things – ignite innovation in our schools and industries, grow and protect a healthy country, and foster global change borne from policies that lead the world.

At the same time, we have the opportunity to touch individual lives, one-on-one, with casework that often reaches people in their darkest hour.

I love the Senate. I love the intensity of the work and the gravity of the issues. I love fighting for West Virginia here.

I learned to love this fight as a 27-year-old VISTA volunteer in the tiny coal community of Emmons, West Virginia. A place that set my moral compass and gave me direction. Where everything in my real life began. Where I learned how little I knew about the problems people face. I was humbled by that lesson.

My time there was transformative. It explains every policy I pursued and every vote I have cast. It was where my beliefs were bolted down. And where my passion met my principle.

Emmons was where I came to understand that out of our everyday struggles, our greater selves can emerge. Truly making a difference couldn't be an afterthought; rather it requires a singular focus and relentless effort. It would be hard, but the work would matter.

Important undertakings can't be half-hearted. You have to commit with your whole self – almost like pushing a heavy rock uphill. With both of your hands, you push because if you let up for a split second, you and the rock are thrown backwards into the abyss.

There is so much at stake.

Even today, in West Virginia, too many are struggling. They're fighting to survive and wary of what the future holds. So we fight twice as hard and twice as long. Nothing stops us.

There is vast dignity and honor in helping people. You cannot let it go.

I believe genuinely in the ability of government to do good, to serve, and to right injustices.

This is why the Senate must be a place in which we embrace a commitment to be deliberative, passionate, and unrelenting. It must be a place in which we are driven only by the duty and trust bestowed upon us by the people we serve. This is where everything else should be boxed out.

Politics led us here. But this is where we shed the campaigning and embrace our opportunity to lead, to listen, to dig in, to bridge differences, to govern – to truly make a difference.

At our core, we must be drawn to the hard, all-consuming policy work that lives in briefings, hearing rooms, and round tables. Yet our North Star must always be the real needs of the people we serve.

And so, policy starts with listening. It is seeing the faces of our constituents, hearing them out, understanding their needs and problems – knowing them. Listening, to constituents and colleagues alike, is absolutely necessary.

Good policy is borne out of compromise. Compromise is not easy, but it can happen when we listen to each other. By opening ourselves to understanding and hearing our colleagues.

We separate our campaign selves from our public service selves. The cruelty of perpetual campaigns destroys our ability to fulfill our oath of office. It is hard to build a working relationship in this institution without an honest and open approach with our colleagues.

But we must build that relationship – because together we can do so much.

Listening and compromise were key to the work of the National Commission on Children in the 1990s. As the Chair of the Commission, which included a bipartisan group of government officials at all levels, and policy experts of all backgrounds, I can tell you that reaching consensus was tough. But we listened, we debated, and we trusted.

Even the most liberal and conservative among us knew that each had the best interest of children at heart. While meeting in Williamsburg, Virginia, I had to leave suddenly for an important Senate vote on Iraq. I handed over the gavel to our most conservative Republican member, someone in whom I had total trust.

In the end, we were proud to vote 32-0 to support bold policies including the creation of a new refundable child tax credit, and a major expansion of the Earned Income Tax Credit – a policy that lifted millions of working families out of poverty.

It worked because we listened to one another, respected one another, and wanted to come to an agreement. 32 – 0! Is this possible these days? I still believe it is.

And I believe that we can see that spirit again as we address the future of the bipartisan Children's Health Insurance Program. CHIP, as it is commonly known, currently provides health

care to 8.3 million children and pregnant women nationwide, and 40,000 in West Virginia.

CHIP is important to me because it offers health care to children, including coverage for mental and dental health issues. It is, in fact, better coverage than the Affordable Care Act provides children.

From those early days as a VISTA, I have seen the devastating toll that a lack of medical care can extract upon a child's well-being, health, self-esteem, and even their will to succeed. Many of you also know the names and faces of children who have gone without access to proper health care. They are who we fight for.

That is why CHIP has always been a bipartisan effort – driven by the needs of real kids and their families. Senators Grassley and Hatch were instrumental in its creation and they continue to be strong advocates.

The bipartisan Children's Health Insurance Program has opened doors for millions who desperately needed to get into a doctor's office. However, every door that CHIP opened will be closed unless we can agree to fund CHIP past 2015. I have faith that we will be inspired to act by the faces of those children in our communities who rely on CHIP.

It is those individual faces we remember.

Remembering for whom we work is paramount. When any corporate CEO comes to my office, I show them a prized birthday gift from my children -- a picture of a hardworking coal miner whose face is honest, worn, and proud. That picture means so much to me because it embodies the spirit of those I am here to serve, and silently reminds us of why we must work toward a common ground.

Mike Enzi and I aren't on same side of every vote. But we are good friends. A friendship made years ago when I was serving on the Coal Commission and he was the Mayor of Gillette, Wyoming.

On a gray January day in 2006, West Virginia was frozen in disbelief as we learned that 12 trapped miners were killed in the Sago Mine. In the days that followed – as we struggled to make sense of what happened – Senator Enzi and Senator Isakson joined Senator Kennedy, Senator Manchin and me in West Virginia. They did not merely visit. They came to understand, to learn, to share in the grief, and to offer their support to our community.

Together, out of that tragedy, we forged a compromise on mine safety legislation that brought about the strongest safety improvements in a generation.

To this day, Senator Isakson carries a picture of one of the Sago miners. We knew that, as public officials, compromising and really leading – that governing – was our charge.

Answering the needs of our Country is our responsibility. And we do that best when we work shoulder-to-shoulder.

It was working shoulder-to-shoulder when we set our Country on a path to future innovation. A few years ago America's domination in our innovation, inventions, and creative problem solving was eroding. We needed to act – to reinvigorate our leadership in those areas, and to keep our jobs and our future secure.

We answered that call with the bipartisan compromise that delivered the America COMPETES Reauthorization Act.

The legislation made historic investments in science, basic research, and STEM education.

Senator Hutchison, Senator Alexander, and I sought Unanimous Consent to get the bill passed prior to recess, but five “holds” remained on the Republican side.

Instead of retreating to party corners and pointing fingers, we compromised. We trimmed the cost of the \$44 billion bill by \$1 billion, while Senator Hutchinson and Senator Alexander tenaciously worked to clear the holds. It was perfect!

Together we passed a bill to revive our Country's flagging global performance rankings and catapult us to success.

Reaching moments like those requires persistence. It demands collaboration, trust, and compromise. And it is worth it.

I am driven by the process of creating policy. It is grinding and intense. It can be frustrating and sometimes heartbreaking. But when we accomplish something that is meaningful to the people who have trusted us to represent them, there is no greater reward.

We have to know who and what we must fight for in our work. We have to know and understand those who will benefit. And we have to be ready for it to take a long time – longer than we want. Sometimes it takes five or 10 years, but we cannot ever give up the fight because we keep in our souls the faces of the people we try to help – the people all too often left behind.

The Senate must face serious social and policy issues – from health care to cyber security, caring for our veterans coming home, building up our infrastructure, and making our economy work for everyone.

These are our core responsibilities. I am proud that we have made some measure of progress. And while we seem to be at an impasse, I know that the Senate will rise to the mission of addressing our biggest issues.

As a governing body, we must not allow recent failures to take root. We must not be focused on episodic, “gotcha” issues rather than working to address broader, more systemic problem solving. No one else will step in to do this work.

This truth was on full display a few weeks ago when the Senate failed to move forward on National Security Administration reforms necessary to uphold the mission of protecting our Nation.

I've taken seriously my 14 years on the Intelligence Committee, as a member and Chairman. Because the global threats we face increase daily as the world becomes more connected, we depend on the highly trained professionals at NSA to zero in on those threats. We must not outsource our intelligence work to telecommunications firms governed by profits rather than a solemn oath to our Country's security.

It is the job of government to address these issues and many more. The private sector and free market alone cannot solve all of our problems.

Good, hard-working people can be destroyed by circumstances beyond their control. It is our job to not let that happen. It is our job to help. To give everyone a fair shot.

To say that everyone deserves a fair shot is of course an idea easier said than done. But that is our charge.

Too many children come into a world where circumstances preclude the opportunities they should have.

We cannot discount the many challenges our society still faces. It is unconscionable – in a Country like ours – that people go without health care, or go hungry, or have no place to call home.

When shareholders and the free market cannot – or will not – solve our problems, it is government's responsibility to step in.

When private companies decide there isn't enough profit to provide Internet to rural areas, or they may not make enough by insuring the sickest of our children, we must act. That is our core mission. It is who we are as an institution. It is who we must be.

We have worked to give children a fair shot through E-Rate, a program which introduces even the most rural classrooms and smallest libraries to the world through the Internet. Access to a

foreign language class, or scientific research a world away, won't guarantee success, but it gives every child the key to unlock their potential.

We know health care is fundamental to a fair shot as well. You can't learn or keep a job if you are sick. But, providing that care hasn't always been as profitable as some companies would like. So we made sure millions of Americans could have the dignity of access to health care under the Affordable Care Act.

My friend Sam is one of those faces I'll never forget. When he was battling childhood leukemia and hit his life-time insurance cap, his parents' insurance company walked away from this courageous fighter. His parents, both school teachers, were left with heart-wrenching suggestions – like getting divorced so Sam could qualify for Medicaid.

Unfortunately, Sam lost his battle with cancer.

But today, under the ACA, we have made sure no insurance company could abandon someone like Sam when they need help the most.

Health care reform won't ever take away the crushing agony of parents with sick kids, but heart breaking situations like Sam's drove us to say "no more" and change the law. Parents deserve to focus every bit of energy fighting for their kids -- not fighting profit-obsessed insurance companies. We did the right thing.

Government also did the right thing when I fought like my life depended on it to pass the Coal Act of 1992. We had to step in to stop some coal companies from walking away from benefits they promised to retired coal miners and their widows.

Passing the Coal Act was enormously important to our Country. It not only prevented a national coal strike in 1993, but delivered on the promise of lifetime health benefits earned by 200,000 retired coal miners and their widows. They wouldn't have been taken care of if those companies had their way.

Nor can we rely on the private sector alone to take care of our veterans. It is government's duty to provide the health care they earned. We do this through community-based clinics, and improved services for the treatment of PTSD and Traumatic Brain Injury, and family supports.

We rightly ask that government takes on some of society's most fundamental needs. What I found in Emmons was a community of genuinely strong, incredibly hard-working people. People who were essentially on their own.

The free market had not made sure that communities like Emmons had good roads, good schools and school buses, clean drinking water, or safe jobs. But they deserved all of those and more.

Working together to deliver on the needs for places like Emmons speaks to our core human connection – and to an aspiration for the greater good. That is what drove me to public service – to help people with everything I have.

Every individual in every community like Emmons deserves to have public officials who will fight the big fights and the personal ones.

Extending a hand on those personal challenges is incredibly meaningful work. Our constituents face those fights with Herculean courage, but not always the resources to solve the problems in front of them.

People like the eight-year-old who needed a bone marrow transplant – a procedure that, in 1990, was considered experimental. I am proud we helped get that boy his transplant, and he is still with us today.

As a Senator, you take on each of those fights with the same vigor as any policy debate. And you are equally proud when you win.

When I came to West Virginia 50 years ago, I was searching for a clear purpose for my life's work. I wanted the work to be really hard. And what I got was the opportunity to work incredibly hard – along with a real and utterly spiritual sense of mission.

This work demands and deserves nothing less than everything you have to give.

I will miss the Senate. Some days, I don't want to leave, but it is time.

That brings me to some profoundly important notes of gratitude.

To my colleagues – thank you. To those I have mentioned and so many more, know that I am grateful to have served with dedicated and brilliant public servants. Thank you for fighting alongside me. Thank you for challenging me.

To my staff -- a Senator is nothing without his staff. And there is not a more committed, talented, and deeply passionate staff in the United States Senate. You live and breathe your work every day.

You inspire me with your endless capacity for redressing injustice, and fighting for people who need you and come to you in need. You never turned a single West Virginian away. I glory in my gratitude to you.

To my family, who has sacrificed so much, I thank you. I have been selfish in my devotion to my work and have been vastly inept in balancing family and work. Public service is not encouraging of balance.

Sharon – you are everything – extraordinary mother, businesswoman, and public servant. You have been a visionary in public broadcasting. Our entire nation is indebted to your efforts to educate and inform us. The impact you continue to make on public life is truly remarkable. Any achievement I am proud of, I share eternally with you.

Our children – John, Valerie, Charles and Justin – you have been so thoughtfully and endlessly supportive. And our grandchildren, who bring me so much joy – I will treasure having more time with you.

And to West Virginia, thank you for placing your faith in me and giving me the greatest reward – the chance to fight for meaningful and lasting opportunity, for those who are too often forgotten but absolutely deserve the best.

I am forever inspired by you. And I am forever transformed by you.

Thank you, Mr. President. I yield the floor.